

Julie Kane

Akhmatova

St. Petersburg, 2002

While Pushkin monuments were everywhere,
It took some time to find the right address
Where Stalin caged her like a lioness.
The courtyard trees (her only view) were bare.
Indoors: a shabby couch, a desk, a chair,
And two more images of Pushkin's face
Invading even her domestic space —
I guess it gave her hope to see him there.
Imagine thirty years of house arrest
Made somehow bearable by books and art,
The silver icon of the chilled dawn kiss.
Before my own home country fell apart —
It makes me so ashamed, admitting this —
I envied her that subject matter's heft.

The Scream

I used to have a scream stuck in my throat
No matter what I did to jam it down:
Unswallowed pill on which I used to choke

No matter how much alcohol or smoke
I flung at it to try to wash it down.
I used to have a scream stuck in my throat:

Teakettle steam about to sing its note
Or seam of lava barely pressured down.
In desperation, I would sometimes choke

On random cocks to give the thing a poke.
Like tamping pipe tobacco farther down —
But still I had a scream stuck in my throat.

Not like a scream in nightmares, where no mote
Of sound escapes though monsters hunt you down:
In dreams, you want to scream, but still you choke.

This monster was still there when I awoke;
No earthly weaponry could bring it down,
Those years I had a scream stuck in my throat
Until I spoke my truth and did not choke.

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Baby of the Family

It was the month the orca
Would not release her calf,
Nosing it to the surface
When it slid off her back.
“She carried it a thousand miles,”
Said the whale research staff.

J-Pod’s numbers were dwindling,
Live births a thing of the past.
But it swam for thirty minutes,
Unlike her stillborn calf.
“It’s almost like a parable,”
Said the whale research staff.

D. was our family’s baby,
Most probably the last.
All those in *vitro* treatments,
Those shots in the ass.
The mother made a “tour of grief,”
Said the whale research staff.